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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 002593

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [CASC](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAI PROTEST UPDATE: POLICE UNABLE TO TAKE CONTROL
AS PAD SEIZES THE INITIATIVE

REF: A. BANGKOK 2575 (WARRANTS BUT NO ARRESTS)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 2555 (POLICE AND PAD COEXIST)
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 2546 (PAD PROTESTS CHALLENGE PM SAMAK)
[1](#)D. BANGKOK 2405 (TENSIONS ESCALATE AT THAI PROTESTS)

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary and Comment:

[1](#)1. (C) The stand-off between the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and the administration of Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej continued for the fourth day August 29, with the dynamics changing dramatically during the day. The police, which continued to refrain from using force, seemed by mid-day on the verge of establishing an effective cordon around the Government House compound occupied by the PAD. However, when a column of PAD supporters surged out the front gate and pushed aggressively at the riot police line at 1500 local time, police withdrew rather than standing their ground, losing their chance to keep the protest contained. Several additional worker unions came out in support of the PAD's protest, while a work stoppage by the railway union shut down the state railway system, and a number of regional airports shut down around the country. Thailand enters the weekend apprehensive that the situation may be spinning out of control.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Samak and his government have continued to exercise patience in their approach to the protests. Early on August 29, PAD leader Sondhi Limthongkul called for supporters to hang on in the Government House compound, until August 31, suggesting an exit strategy may still be available for both the PAD and the government. While the government's restraint has won praise from the public and the media through August 29, it is unclear if the government will be able to manage public opinion if it continues to allow the PAD and worker unions to hobble government and the transportation routes. The events of the afternoon will lead many to see the Samak government teetering between two unpalatable choices: capitulation to the PAD mob, or resort to force to restore order, something Samak has continually vowed until this point not to do. End Summary and Comment.

POLICE UNABLE TO MAINTAIN CONTROL AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE

[1](#)3. (U) Tension between the PAD and the government of PM Samak

heightened August 29. The PAD overnight prevented the incoming police contingent in the normal middle-of-the-night police shift change from entering the Government House compound. This reduced the total number of police still on the compound from 2000 to probably no more than 250-400. PAD leaders continued to challenge the government and ignore court orders to vacate Government House. Sondhi Limthongkul publicly called on PAD supporters to hold out until Sunday, August 31, while co-leader Chamlong Srimuang challenged the police to clear the compound sooner rather than later.

14. (U) Around 11:00 am on August 29, officers of the Civil Court, with the assistance of a large number of police, posted warrants for the eviction of protesters from the Government House compound at various locations near the compound, and started forming a cordon to isolate access to the compound. Minor skirmishes between protesters and police broke out at various places, particularly as 300 riot police forced their way through a back gate onto the compound, and television feed showed some protesters at the first aid stations with blood on their shirts. The Ministry of Public Health's Medical Emergency Center told us that as of midday there had been approximately ten or twenty injuries, but only two or three serious enough to require hospital treatment.

15. (U) Despite police statements that they were going to establish an external cordon outside Government House, PAD supporters continued to stream into the compound. Provincial police forces brought in to assist with the crowd control appeared tired and uneasy, and ultimately proved unable to fulfill PM Samak's order to establish a cordon around

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Government House.

16. (U) In the decisive development of the day, PAD supporters surged out of the compound at 1500 towards their traditional rallying point, Matthawan Bridge, about five hundred meters away. This area had previously been cleared of protesters and secured by the police, but rather than holding their line, the police instead made an orderly retreat, abandoning efforts to form a complete cordon around the compound. Later reports indicated that police abandoned many established checkpoints and withdrew to the Metropolitan Police Bureau.

TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS HOBbled

17. (U) After two days of action solely in Bangkok, the PAD activated its provincial strategy again overnight. Workers from state-owned railway union started a work stoppage, stopping forty-one trains from the northeast, south, and northern parts of the country which normally would have come to Bangkok. The industrial action shut down all train service in Thailand by mid day August 29. Following calls from PAD leaders to block regional airports, PAD demonstrators completely shutdown regional airports throughout the country, including major tourist hubs such as Phuket and Chiang Mai.

18. (U) The industrial action appears poised to spread; the State Enterprise Workers' Union resolved to join the PAD demonstrations starting the evening of August 29, which should significantly boost the number of demonstrators. Thai International Airways Workers' Union suggested to its members that they take a sick day in protest of police actions. Other government workers' unions are reportedly considering work stoppages or similar actions.

SAMAK REMAINS PATIENT BUT FOR HOW LONG?

19. (C) Despite the ongoing protests and the actions taken by the PAD and labor unions, Samak and the government continued to exercise restraint. The question heading into the weekend is: for how long? Arsa Sarasin, the King's Personal Private

Secretary, told Ambassador late August 29 that he was worried something significant would happen over the weekend; the latest developments, he lamented, made Samak look like the government was losing control of the situation. Arsa debunked PAD claims of royal support: "The King and Queen are not involved in these things."

¶10. (U) We are issuing a consular warden message shortly.
JOHN